

The Leaking Bucket: Why Issaias Afeworki's "Education Overhaul" is a Strategic Deception

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In his Monday, 12 January 2026, interview, Issaias Afeworki followed a decades-old script that has become the hallmark of his administration: beginning with an exhaustive, high-level analysis of global and regional geopolitics. By framing Eritrea as a pivotal player in a world of shifting power dynamics and "powerful enemies," Issaias employs a calculated diversionary tactic. This grand geopolitical posturing is designed to gloss over domestic failures and cultivate a "survival mindset" among the population.

By convincing the Eritrean people that the nation is under constant existential threat



from external forces, the Issaias creates a psychological state of siege. In this environment, the demand for basic rights, economic opportunity, and accountability is reframed as a luxury - or worse, a betrayal. Under the guise of national survival, the government escapes any real scrutiny for its internal policies, leaving the people to follow without question

while the country stagnates.

It was within this context of "survival" that Issaias pivoted to his wish list for 2026 and beyond, focusing on a supposed "top-down overhaul" of an education system he now labels a "failure." While he correctly identifies human capital as the engine of development, his diagnosis is a calculated deception. By blaming the quality of education for the country's woes, Issaias is attempting to fix the plumbing while the foundation of the house is being intentionally dismantled by his own hand.

The Myth of the Unskilled Population

Issaias' assertion that Eritrea's development is lagging due to a failed education system suggests that the country lacks the intellectual capacity to build itself. This is a disingenuous narrative. For decades, Eritrea has produced brilliant doctors, engineers, economists, chemists, technicians, and etc. The tragedy is not that these people were never educated; it is that they are no longer in Eritrea.

Eritrea's primary export is no longer potash or gold; it is its youth. The "failed" education system that Issaias speaks of has, in fact, been functional enough to produce thousands of professionals who are currently driving the economies of Europe, North America, Africa and the Gulf. The problem is not the *input* of the education system; it is the *output* of a political system that treats its youth as the indefinite property of the state.

The Elephant in the Room: Indefinite National Service

Issaias spoke of "mobilizing human resources," a phrase that, in the Eritrean context, carries a chilling weight. For over two decades, the system of indefinite National Service has transformed the most productive years of an Eritrean's life into a period of state-mandated servitude.

When a university graduate faces the prospect of a decades-long assignment with a symbolic salary and no personal autonomy, the logical response is flight. You can overhaul a curriculum a thousand times, but if the reward for academic excellence is a lifetime of conscription in a remote military outpost, the brightest minds will continue to seek the exit. The shortage of skilled and unskilled labor is a self-inflicted wound. The "brain drain" is a direct survival strategy against a political climate that offers no space for private enterprise or career self-determination.

The Only Way Out: Rule of Law, Democracy, and Justice

If Issaias were truly serious about mobilizing human resources for 2026 and beyond, he would not be looking at school textbooks; he would be looking at the **1997 Constitution**.

The "quagmire" Eritrea finds itself in - characterized by mass migration, economic isolation, and a demoralized workforce - cannot be solved by technical educational reforms. The real solution lies in the restoration of the **Rule of Law**. For nearly three decades, Eritrea has been governed by decree, without a sitting parliament, without independent courts, and without a transparent legal framework.

To reverse the exodus of the youth and truly develop the nation, the government must move beyond the "survival mindset" and embrace, to name a few:

- **The Implementation of the Constitution:** The ratified 1997 Constitution provides the basic framework for civil liberties and the limitation of executive power. Without it, there is no “justice” for the individual.
- **The Opening of Political Space:** A nation cannot develop in a vacuum of ideas. By suppressing all political opposition and independent media, the state has stifled the very innovation and “human resource” it now claims to value.
- **National Elections:** Legitimacy and accountability are the bedrock of stability. Genuine national elections would signal to the Eritrean people - and the diaspora - that the country belongs to its citizens, not to a single party or leader.

A Sieve Cannot Hold Water

Isaias’ proposal to “overhaul” the education system is akin to pouring more water into a leaking bucket. If the political environment remains unchanged, any improvement in education will simply result in more “highly qualified” refugees.

Development is not merely a matter of technical skills; it is a matter of human dignity and incentive. People invest their talents in a country where they have a stake, where their rights are protected by law, and where they can vote for their future.

The assertion that an educational overhaul will save the day is a stalling tactic - a way to signal “progress” while maintaining the structures of oppression. The “failure” Issaias speaks of is not in the schools; it is in a leadership that uses global bogeymen to hide domestic decay. Until the political space is opened and the constitution is implemented, the grand plans for 2026 and beyond will remain nothing more than a wish list written on the walls of an emptying house.